VCE continues to serve the needs of Virginians with a broad array of research-based educational programming. Due to the variety and scope of these efforts it is always difficult to provide an all-inclusive summary. However, here are a few “goings on” and impacts from around the state that may be of interest.

VCE now has a grant funded position titled the SWVA Agribusiness Opportunities Project Manager. This position is jointly funded by $259,000 from the Virginia Tobacco Commission and GO Virginia Region One for a three-year period with the goal of advancing agricultural economic development opportunities in far southwest Virginia. Sharlene Prosser started in this position on April 25 and is located in the Southwest District office.

Extension agents documented $1.15 million in agricultural damages from Hurricane Isaias in Fall 2020. By comparison, agents reported nearly $14 million in agricultural damages from the February ice storms, receiving praise from the Commissioner of Agriculture for their reporting efforts in both cases. A VCE Farm Accident Report is housed on Extension’s Disaster Education Network page on the public website at this link: https://ext.vt.edu/family/vceden.html and SWCD staff are invited to submit farm accidents if they become aware of any.

The Virginia Voluntary Ag BMP Farmer Survey project continues to move along. VCE and DCR are working in collaboration on current stages. We are still on track to have the final report ready for review by the Task Force in November and subsequent reporting in December.

VCE provided leadership for an interdisciplinary Southern Region Program Leadership Network (SR-PLN) effort to inventory virtual programming lessons learned from Extension systems throughout the south. Questions sought input on challenges faced and overcome, how participation was affected by virtual events, evaluating virtual events to capture and report impact, organizational changes resulting from virtual content delivery, and how folks see themselves doing their jobs differently in the future. There were many similarities noted among Extension systems.

Virginia Cooperative Extension agents have been serving as a bridge at the local level to facilitate sharing of information about COVID-19 vaccine with eligible citizens from the very early stages of vaccine availability. Agents shared this information through newsletters, newspaper articles, posting fliers at locations frequented by farm clientele, and social media. Agents also worked with the Virginia Department of Health, local government, and/or partner organizations to develop lists of essential workers that desired to be vaccinated. And, agents worked with VDH to identify centralized locations used by farmers where shots can then be administered. While approaches differ, the common thread is Virginia Cooperative Extension serving as a community connector, sharing information, creating efficiencies, and proactively addressing local needs. Case in point, one county government provided 100% local funding to place an additional employee in the VCE-Madison County office specifically to field calls about the COVID-19 vaccine. As of April 27, 2021 10,550 calls had been received at the office, which helped facilitate 42% of eligible Madison County residents becoming fully vaccinated.

The Virginia Tech Alumni Association Awards for Excellence in Extension went to Roy Flanagan (agent) and Dr. Steve Rideout (specialist).

There are 211 total Extension agents as of the second week in June. This includes 91 ANR, 80 4-H, 32 FCS, and 8 FCS SNAP-Ed agents.